



TESTIMONY OF GOVERNOR LINDA LINGLE

Before the

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT

Tuesday, January 30, 2007

HB 1280 RELATING TO INNOVATION IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Chair Sonson, Vice Chair Nakasone, and Members of the House Committee on Labor and Public Employment. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1280, Relating to Innovation in Workforce Development.

House Bill 1280 was introduced as a measure to help Hawaii's companies and workers remain competitive in the global market of changing technology in business and industry. It is one of the four major bills that will be heard on our innovation initiative during this legislative session. The initiative is aimed at raising the standard of living in Hawaii and I want to underscore its importance.

The bill has four related components – lifelong learning accounts, rapid response training programs, "Kama'aina Come Home," and a merging of certain Department of Labor and Industrial Relations components with Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism components.

Lifelong learning accounts, the first of the four components, are basically employer-matched, 401-K-type savings accounts to pay for upgrading the skills of current employees. It encourages a partnership between the employee and the employer in order to leverage resources for training.

The rapid response training program develops customized training programs. It allows the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism to contract with providers to develop a workforce for anticipated new industries or changes in existing industries, such as ship building.

We saw the reverse of this situation happen in the recent move of Hoku Scientific to Idaho. Among other incentives, Hoku Scientific received from Idaho more than a million dollars in workforce training funds.

The third program, the “Kama‘aina Come Home” program, is representative of much of the innovation initiative that we will be discussing throughout this session. It is a comprehensive and collaborative program designed to attract back to Hawai‘i our own kama‘aina who have high-demand work skills.

The “Kama‘aina Come Home” program will include: a) creating a voluntary database of all high school seniors in the State and tracking them in order to get them back home when jobs become available; b) enhancing the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations’ “HireNet” job search website with a special focus for our kama‘aina; and, c) periodic mainland events to inform and to recruit workers.

The fourth and final component of this “Innovation Workforce” bill is a merging over the next year of the workforce development programs and economic development programs of the State. This is not about turf. It is about Hawai‘i’s future. It allows for a comprehensive and strategic approach which has previously been proposed by the Legislature. The idea has been supported and recommended by our Economic Momentum Commission. It is a move that the National Governors Association has studied in detail and has concluded that there are many benefits by this sort of realignment. The roles and responsibilities of the Workforce Development Councils in each county would be preserved.

I encourage you to pass out of your committee House Bill 1280 as one of the four pillars of our efforts to place Hawaii on the road to a new, innovative future.